REVISITING PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

Réexaminer la philosophie de l'éducation

Repensar la filosofía de la educación

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RESUMEN

El punto de partida para este estudio es la concepción de Richard Peters de la filosofía de la educación, así como las modificaciones que ha sufrido debidas a su discusión en el contexto anglosajón y a las críticas posmodernas. A la luz de los cambios actuales en la educación, esta contribución se pregunta sobre su futuro. Se argumenta, enfocándose en el debate sobre la investigación educativa, que aunque ésta no pueda evitar abarcar asuntos conceptuales y de justificación, no debe entenderse como un método más. Y aunque los filósofos de la educación escriben para audiencias diferentes (otros filósofos y filósofos de la educación), no obstante no deberían ignorar a quienes trabajan en la práctica y la política educativas. Por tanto su investigación debería ser 'política', superando el enfoque crítico usual para sugerir cómo las cosas podrían hacerse de manera diferente. Esto ilustraría la relevancia de la filosofía de la educación.

Palabras clave: filosofía de la educación, Richard Stanley Peters, críticas posmodernas, investigación educativa, método, Peter Winch, Ludwig Wittgenstein, práctica educativa, política educativa.

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SUMMARY

This study starts from the way philosophy of education was conceived by Richard Peters, how it has been amended in succeeding discussions within the Anglo-Saxon context as well has been the object of postmodern criticisms. Due to the changes in the educational area, it then asks what follows for its programme. Focusing on the debate concerning educational research it is argued that though it cannot do without addressing conceptual and justification issues, this should not be seen as a particular method. Philosophers of education write for different audiences (colleagues working in philosophy and philosophy of education), but they should not ignore those who are involved in educational practice and policy. They should therefore engage in a particular kind of 'political' research which transgresses the usual critical approach by offering also suggestions about how things could be done otherwise thus exemplifying the relevance of philosophy of education.

Key words: philosophy of education, Richard Stanley Peters, postmodernism, educational research, method, Peter Winch, Ludwig Wittgenstein, educational practice, educational policy.

SOMMAIRE

Le point de départ de cette étude est la manière de laquelle la philosophie de l'éducation était conçue par Richard Peters, comment elle était amendée par les discussions successives dans le contexte anglo-saxon et comment elle est devenue l'objet des critiques postmodernes. Ensuite, cette contribution interroge les conséquences des changements récents dans le domaine de l'éducation pour le programme de la philosophie de l'éducation. Le débat de la recherche scientifique pédagogique prouve qu'elle ne peut pas négliger ni les concepts ni les questions justificatoires, mais que ça ne constitue pas de méthode particulière. Les philosophes de l'éducation écrivent pour des publics différents (des collègues de la philosophie et de la philosophie de l'éducation). Tout de même ils ne pourraient pas oublier ceux qui travaillent dans la praxis et la politique de l'éducation. A conséquence, ils doivent s'engager dans une recherche 'politique' qui transgresse la critique habituelle en offrant aussi des modes d'agir alternatifs. Ainsi cette approche montre l'importance de la philosophie de l'éducation.

Mots clés: philosophie de l'éducation, Richard Stanley Peters, postmodernisme, recherche scientifique pédagogique, method, Peter Winch, Ludwig Wittgenstein, praxis de l'éducation, politique de l'éducation.

1.   INTRODUCING THE PROBLEM

What philosophy of education should occupy itself with has been the focus of many papers in the subdiscipline. This study starts from the way it was conceived

by Richard Peters in the high days of Analytical Philosophy of Education, how this has been amended in succeeding discussions within the Anglo-Saxon context as well has been the object of postmodern criticisms. The paper then goes on to ask the question whether anything significantly has changed since then in the educational area and whether anything follows from there for the programme of philosophy of education. Focusing on the debate concerning educational research it is argued that it cannot do without taking into account all aspects of what is involved in education, i. e. conceptual and justification issues. Yet what philosophy of education offers cannot be identified by characterizing it in terms of a particular method. Recent attention given to this issue is used to analyze what is presupposed in an approach which prioritizes method. Detailing this by an example of philosophy of educational research, it is argued that philosophers of education, though they write for different audiences (colleagues working in philosophy and philosophy of education), they should not ignore the relevance of writing and speaking to those who are involved in educational practice and policy. It is concluded that they should engage in a particular kind of 'political' research which transgresses the usual critical approach by offering also suggestions about how things could be done otherwise. Such alternatives should add to the critical debate that takes place and thus exemplifies the relevance of philosophy of education.

2. PHILOSOPHY OF… PHILOSOPHY AND…: A RE-APPRAISAL

Though there always have been philosophers interested in education, following developments in 'ordinary-language philosophy' in the English-speaking countries after World War Two, a particular style of *philosophy of* education became influential. Predominantly analytical, aiming for something more systematic it sought to bring a new rigour to its subject and replace the rather woolly version of educational theory in which the various theoretical disciplines could barely be distinguished. In the introduction of *Ethics and Education* (1966) Richard Peters writes:

> There was a time when it was taken for granted that the philosophy of education consisted in the formulation of high-level directives which would guide educational practice and shape the organization of schools and universities. These expectations of philosophy still persist in ordinary language. They are as implicit in the question 'What is his philosophy of education' as they are in the question 'What is his philosophy of life?' Professional philosophers, however, are embarrassed by such expectations. For during the twentieth century, philosophy has been undergoing a revolution, which has consisted largely in an increasing awareness of what philosophy is and is not. …They [philosophers] cast themselves in the more mundane Lockian role of underlabourers in the garden of knowledge. The disciplined demarcation of concepts, the patient explication of the grounds of knowledge and of the presuppositions of different forms of discourse, has become their stock-in-trade. …The image of the spectator is an appropriate one; for just as a spectator,

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to a certain extent, detaches himself from the activities of which is a spectator in order to watch and comment on them, so also does a philosopher detachedly ponder upon and probe into activities and forms of discourse in which he and others engage. …What distinguishes the philosopher is the type of second-order questions which he asks. These are basically the same questions asked by Socrates at the beginning-the questions 'what do you mean?' and 'How do you know?'… Philosophers make explicit the conceptual schemes which such beliefs [i. e., the traditional stock of beliefs and customs on which people rely and which may compete with each other] and standards presuppose; they examine their consistency and search for criteria for their justification. …What then are the main issues with which the philosophy of education is concerned?

(i)   There is, first of all, the analysis of concepts specific to education-such as 'education', 'teaching', 'training', and 'university', and 'school'…

(ii) The application of ethics and social philosophy to education should be obvious enough. There are assumptions about worth-while content which require justification; there are also assumptions about the desirability of the procedures by means of which this is to be transmitted…

(iii) Assumptions about the transmission also raise not only low-level empirical questions about learning and motivation but also fundamental problems in philosophical psychology about the conceptual schemes employed by educational psychologists and the types of procedures by means of which their assumptions can be tested −e. g. Freudian assumptions about the 'unconscious'− which are particular problems in the philosophy of science.

(iv) Finally there are all sorts of philosophical problems connected with the curriculum… (Peters, 1966, 15-18).

Along these lines philosophers of education identified and exposed fallacies in reasoning, battled against fundamental errors such as ethical relativism and epistemological reductivism, and aimed for a coherent and systematic rationalisation of beliefs and practices. This was to be achieved by importing the rigour and the supposed ideological neutrality of linguistic and analytic methods in philosophy proper. Due to a relentless pursuit of clarity and truth, philosophy of education came to be seen as epistemologically *foundational*: as the judge of matters of value and meaning, and the arbiter of appropriate theory for explaining human behaviour in the educational sphere[1]. The criticisms of this position raised in the half of a century since then are well-known: truth has now come to seem a little less innocent; analytical philosophy of education relied too much on the notion that the distinctions made in ordinary language, once recovered and clarified, have the power to sweep away the obscurities introduced by tendentious ways of thinking and writing; and the aspiration to map the logical geography of educational

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1. See BLAKE, SMEYERS, SMITH and STANDISH (2003), for a further elaboration of this position.

concepts was naïve in its supposition that there is such a geography, unitary and one-dimensional, to be definitively mapped. In the *Blackwell Guide* it was argued that:

> The analysis of such concepts, seen as a matter of clarifying the rules or conditions under which such concepts are used or applied, borrowed from the later Wittgenstein the notion of language as a rule-governed activity; but it was blind to the fact that the notion cannot disclose the necessary and sufficient conditions, or indeed foundations, which philosophers of education were looking for (Blake, Smeyers, Smith and Standish, 2003, 3).

Moreover, in the realm of ethics, analytical philosophy of education was particularly ill-served by the tradition on which it attempted to draw, for example the effect was sometimes to reduce the rich field of ethics to a matter of making 'value judgements'. And at occasions philosophising was treated as *merely* a matter of exercising techniques, as if they could be brought to bear irrespective of the material or topic under analysis and without any great knowledge of matters of substance, i. e. the history of philosophy and the work being done in other areas not in the least outside the English-speaking countries.

To some extent, philosophy of education was slowly influenced among others by the work of the later Wittgenstein and its insistence on inter-subjectivity. A new philosophical interest developed in the social and in social practices and this disclosed anew the hitherto overlooked rationality of those practices associated with the normative sphere. Thus a lot changed since the seminal work of Richard Peters and Paul Hirst which outlined that the curriculum would be grounded in the recognition that certain activities were intrinsically worthwhile, rather than instrumentally opportune –politically, economically or in terms of social control: social and cultural theory begun to embrace the scepticism toward totalising theory, in the words of Lyotard 'an incredulity against metanarratives'. Yet theory may still be required, not as legitimation for principles and actions but as a form of deeper reflection on the nature and implications of the very educational enterprise. To put this differently, if the subject is ineluctably caught in the play of knowledge and power, it is still well worth asking, 'What knowledge and which powers'. Where does that leave philosophy of education?

Starting from seeing education as a field of study that involves a variety of approaches, the *Blackwell Guide* argued that philosophical analysis may still concern itself with problems rooted in the use of language in educational discourse. Though this task is not anymore that of a conceptual underlabourer, analytic techniques remain useful. Furthermore, philosophy of education should still address the assumptions and values embedded in other disciplinary approaches in the study of education, whether these are explicitly promoted or tacitly assumed in policy and practice. Evidently, this is now a debate between philosophy and other disciplines on equal terms. Finally, it is clear that philosophy of education has to explore what education might be or might become. It can revisit but also problematize its canonical questions about such matters as the aims of education, the

nature of knowledge and the point of particular curriculum subjects, about human nature and human practices. Thus it might analyze for instance what exactly is understood by quality (and its indicators) and what the hidden normative presu-ppositions are of the present-day logic of neo-liberalism. Overall it seems to be accepted that it requires not narrow concentration but a flexible and imaginative drawing from different aspects of the 'parent' discipline in relation to specific but typically highly complex problems of practice. And as the weakening of the influence on education of the disciplines of psychology, sociology, history and philosophy has led to the growth of instant experts and pseudo-disciplines, approaches that lack the critical traditions of enquiry (and a body of literature with its community of academics developed over a period of time) that are the source of coherence and rigour, it may imply that education as a field of study returns (in a qualified way) to these disciplines.

In a recent paper in *Educational Theory* (2009), «Philosophy of Education To-day», Joseph Chambliss reviews the current state of the field of philosophy of education through analysis of four recent edited compilations *(A Companion to Philosophy of Education, The Blackwell Guide to Philosophy of Education, The RoutledgeFalmer Reader in Philosophy of Education* and *Philosophy of Education: An Anthology)*. The-se books, he claims, «provide ample evidence that philosophy of education is not only alive, but a flourishing subject matter in academic life» (Chambliss, 2009, 233). In passing he notes that it is particularly telling that the three volumes published by Blackwell include philosophy of education among that publisher's main field of study in philosophy. Clearly, that a lot of work is published in this area is something one should be pleased about. But it is not impossible that this may lead to the wrong impression, i. e., that this academic discipline, that he characterizes at the end of the paper as something that «is what those who write it and teach it say it is» (*ibid*., 251), has established its place in academia for once and for all. Unfortunately this is far from the case. The *Blackwell's Guide* amended version of what philosophy should occupy itself with is not the end of the story. New challenges have turned up which have announced already devastating consequences.

3.   UNIVERSITIES AND ACADEMIA: A GLOOMY PICTURE

Though the discourse about universities is already for some time characteri-zed by such concepts as 'quality'; 'efficiency', and 'enterprise', matters have since then deteriorated further. Universities operate within a general societal climate that has been identified as neo-liberalism in which 'commercialization', 'privati-zation', 'marketization', 'liberalization', 'individual preference', 'competition', are the shibboleths, as well as 'accountability' and 'transparency'. Here as elsewhere a subordination to technical and managerial modes of decision-making have been observed which go hand in hand with target-setting instruments such as mission statements and procedures of auditing and evaluation. Students are now 'our clients' and 'managerialism' enhances methods of control to increase profit and

reduce costs. Thus 'being efficient' has become to mean being cost-effective and 'being accountable' or 'transparent', being able to control and document cost-effectiveness. Though many academics have complained about the recent evolution and have urged universities to resist this trend, it can hardly be disputed that their attempts have not been successful. In the EU several declarations such as the 1991 *Memorandum on Higher Education in the European Community* of the European Commission and even earlier the Bologna Declaration (the 1988 *Magna Carta Universitatum*), have contributed considerably to this development. It is interesting to notice though that the change of the universities was not the result of a sovereign decision-making organ, instead it was a process through persuasion where suggested higher education reforms were marketed. There was talk of the 'knowledge society', of 'employability', 'mobility' and 'lifelong learning' as well as of 'quality assurance'. The European Council in Lisbon (2000) set as objective the promotion of a knowledge economy, which should be the most competitive and dynamic in the world, capable of creating durable economic growth. Globally, knowledge production became economized and evidently the EU did not want to miss that boat. The constraints that have to be faced in the EU are of course not different from what universities encounter worldwide, such as the intensification of very specialized research, the increase of student numbers, the demand of society for professionals and the political pressure to adapt to keep up with the so-called global knowledge economy. The course of public institutions such as the university cannot be separated from the evolution of society as a whole.

Some of the deplorable consequences of the evolution the universities have undergone, not necessarily only due to the mentioned European initiatives, can already be observed: a decrease in student-staff ratio; the existence of two kinds of academic staff (of which a smaller number are tenured and more and more part-time and untenured academics are employed); further a rise of tuition fees, an ever-growing managerial power, a (somewhat permanent state of) structural reorganization, the use of quality indicators and of international statistics on performance indicators, the marketing of the institution, the ranking of departments, universities, research groups and publications. And it may be noticed that generally one does not seem to be bothered about the immense transaction costs of the hyper-bureaucratic procedures that were introduced, neither that academic quality is defined in terms of auditable indicators (carried by the logic of managerialism which has no bounds or limits indulging in checks and double checks without end). There is moreover the recognition that research is increasingly about finance, that it costs a great deal of money, that it generates money but typically only in certain domains. And as there are also other contexts in which a lot of scholarly work is done, the 'stakeholders' are now in a position to correct 'wasteful spending' at the university level, with the possible consequence that some areas of academic research may disappear.

This has led to proclaim the 'death of the university', but also to discussions about the place of the universities in society. It cannot be denied, that we are

getting further and further away from ideals as expressed by Von Humboldt, such as: that teaching and research are linked within the individual; that by 'education through research' the university nourishes the public debate and enhances the development of an enlightened civic culture; or that through the arts and sciences of which men can become part by cultivating themselves, the university raises those who are engaged above the level of economics and politics. Incidentally, in some sense such free development of the person through academic inquiry was not so different at all from what Newman argued for, i. e., to prioritize for teaching by means of the concept of Liberal Learning (as university education had an intellectual and moral dimension which ought not to be sacrificed to specialist knowledge and the momentary needs of the professional world). Much of that is foregone, in the sense that the kind of 'higher ideals' have no (or virtually no) appeal anymore. Individualism, initially driven by emancipation and a desire for personal freedom, has been replaced by the individual desires and wants and has become fully private: the end and projects of the political collective ideal of self-determination have now returned to the individual. Thus the need to justify oneself has disappeared and the subjective standpoint became legitimate on its own terms. Have we moved into a phase where the political juridical 'contract' between individuals along with the absorption by the market in almost every sphere of societal life characterizes our existence? Social relations are treated in terms of supply and demand, of producer or service provider and client, and so we became familiar with life-long learning, the idea of managers of a life plan, and the entrepreneurial self. And moreover, on top of all of this there are the objections against the universal pretensions of modern critical reason, strongly attacked by for instance the Critical Theory and many so-called Post-Modern writers and philosophers.

Habermas, Giroux, Derrida, Rorty and many others have argued to stop the evolution we witness. We should certainly not surrender to performativity! Yet, we too, whether we like it or not, nevertheless belong to this sphere, and at times are happy to be part of it, in some cases in order to 'survive', yet often not 'just' for that reason. Money and power may always have ruled the world and being famous perhaps has always had its appeal, yet the worldwide (high-speed) communication and globalization seem to have intensified the opportunities to take advantage of others, supported by an insatiable need for voyeurism and scandals. Performativity has swept the world in many contexts. It has invaded public services, for instance hospitals and post offices, and has continued its destructive consequences within the walls of the school. It is now spreading its deplorable effects into the area of child-rearing. It exploits fear through risk-management and is nourished by the illusion that all problems can be solved or their negative effects at least lessened, and that there are experts who know how to do that. It finds further ammunition in the idle rhetoric of much empirical educational research that is embraced by the experts and that is supposed to give a foundation for their interventions. Performativity rules in the educational context on the level of the practitioner (the output characteristics on various scales of behaviour of the children), on the level of the

experts (the effectiveness of their interventions concerning the behaviour of the practitioners), and even on the level of educational research (with its shibboleths of 'generalizability' and 'ranking and impact factors').

The problem is not so much a threatening disintegration that should be countered by overarching norms and values, but rather a totalizing transformation of the social realm into a system. Indeed, it is not impossible that a social system has the capacity to create an 'inhuman environment' that nonetheless can function perfectly because of its technological smoothness. Universities may find themselves in such a position. Values and ideals are indeed fragile realities: they are completely dependent on the institutions that incorporate them and give them a public presence. The institute makes the existence of those aims and values that it is supposed to serve, and in this sense the institute is self-referential. This may give occasion to think further about the place of the university within society. Another conclusion may be that room should be made again for scholars, who are to be given gracious time to read, reflect, discuss, and of course write (not only journal articles but books as well) for the scholarly community. Research may be able to continue without scholarship, but it is then likely to be blind for its own presuppositions, useful perhaps but pointless in terms of understanding of what is really going on in the world. But will this be allowed? Denying these problems will get us as far as hoping that a miracle will change the course of events. If performativity rules, is there anything at all we can do to keep alive what we academically values? In other words, is 'If you can't beat them, join them' an option? It may be time to reconsider our core business.

4. EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

An educational research problem[2] is an issue, topic or question, so it is said, that may be theoretical, practical, or a combination thereof. However, in most cases, the starting-point is a particular educational reality that is unsatisfactory to the parties involved. Examples are language learning, participation in higher education of particular groups of society, implementation of educational policies, but also bullying in primary schools, burn-out of teachers, empowerment of parents, etc. Generally educational research grounded in the empirical traditions of the social sciences (commonly called quantitative and qualitative methods) is distinguished from other forms of scholarship such as theoretical, conceptual or methodological essays, critiques of research traditions and practices and those studies grounded in the humanities (e. g., history, philosophy, literary analysis, arts-based inquiry). Since the early twentieth century mainstream educational research is of an empirical

2. I use the position recently developed by the AERA (see AMERICAN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION, 2006).

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nature. Though quantitative methods are still very much used, qualitative research has gradually become more and more important. In quantitative research, one typically looks for a distribution of variables (how many cases are there with this or that characteristic) and for explanations which can be of a deductive-nomological kind (incorporating universal laws) or be of an inductive nature which employs statistics. A subsumption under laws can also offer an explanation not in terms of an argument (a logical structure with premises and conclusions governed by some rule of acceptance), but as a presentation of the conditions relevant to the occurrence of the event and a statement of the degree of probability of the event given these conditions. It has been doubted by many whether it is possible to find universal laws within the context of the social sciences, but even if one accepts the more moderate version that degrees of probabilities of an event can be given, most scholars argue that contextualisation of theoretical insights is necessary. Extremely popular are the so-called randomized field trials. It is important to draw attention to a number of characteristics of such studies, for instance that the outcomes are determined in terms of factors (independent and dependent) that can be measured and manipulated in their constituent parts. But it may also be interesting to notice that in these studies what does not fit into this pattern is mostly simply left out and that thus a picture is generated that suggests that once the facts have been determined, the conclusion follows on of its own accord; and moreover, that such studies have difficulties in accommodating situational and/or historical change and that teachers for instance deal with many things in class situations (identified as so-called 'independent factors') in creative manners, and so on and so forth.

Such insights might put forward the case of qualitative research where a holistic stance is adopted, i. e. where the relation of the elements that are involved is different. Here it is accepted that the presence or absence of something may change the whole picture and, consequently, the conclusions that can be drawn from a particular setting. Educational researchers are interested in 'how things are' (what the facts are, how those who are involved feel about particular things), and in this sense they are interested to understand what they are presented with. In some areas this implies descriptions or reconstructions of the participants' experiences, in others being able to make predictions[3]. It is clear that this presupposes a particular conceptual framework (sometimes also a theory) or at least a set of concepts in order to make sense of the multitude of phenomena one is confronted with. Clearly, it is generally accepted that one is part of an intersubjective reality

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3. Taking us into the direction of a methodological pluralism clearly has a number of advantages. Thus Peter Winch will argue in this legacy that social science has taken the wrong turn. Aspiring to be an empirical study, it exemplifies what is characteristic of a positivist approach. It should rather engage itself with understanding human practices and not so much with predictions of social behaviour, for the central concepts that belong to our understanding of social life are, according to him, incompatible with the concepts central to the activity of scientific prediction.

that may be characterized in various ways (what is considered to be a fact, what we value, how we situate ourselves as human beings). But research is at least potentially also nearly always interested in change, in making improvements (either to prevent particular problems or to address these). Thus it is interested in understanding ways to manipulate certain elements in view of certain outcomes. In this sense the value-ladenness and maybe even the utopian dimension (how one could conceive things differently) come unavoidably forward. This presses the point about the nature of what the researcher is really doing (or is allowed to do or should have to do). Donald Polkinghorne (1995) argues that in an 'analysis of narratives' one looks for common features in different cases in order to define them within a broader category. By pointing at features that different experiences have in common, one can construct cognitive conceptual frameworks. The purpose of the paradigmatic analysis is not only to discover and to describe categories, but also to describe the relationships between categories. In many cases this kind of research is generally analogous to a quantitative design (including hypotheses), with the exception that qualitative data are gathered, i. e. they refer to what people feel about, or what their experience is with, particular things, what they say that their reasons, desires and intentions are. In 'narrative analysis', on the other hand, the data are mostly not in a narrative form. The information comes from different sources: the researcher arranges events and actions by showing how they contribute to the evolution of a plot. The plot is the thematic line of the narrative, the narrative structure that shows how different events contribute to a narrative. The writing of it involves an analytical development, a dialectic between the data and the plot. The resulting narrative must not only fit the data but also bring out an order and a significance not apparent in the data as such. The result is not so much an account of the actual happening of events from an objective point of view as the result of a series of constructions (i. e., something we agree on intersubjectively), it is instead a particular reconstruction of that researcher. Where in the 'analysis of narratives' the narratives (gathered from the participants) are the source of knowledge, the narrative in 'narrative analysis' is the result of the research, i. e. the creation or interpretation the researcher comes up with. Not only in the conclusion that is offered the researcher is *present*, but she is involved all through the process (though different compared to the practitioner's involvement). This kind of 'interpretive research' comes close to those areas of scholarship (see above) that were distinguished from educational research grounded in the empirical traditions of the social sciences. It seems analogous to history and philosophy of education, where, in other words an interpretation is offered. But more needs to be said (cf. also Smeyers, 2001, 2006, 2008a, 2008b).

As a particular characterization of human behaviour has implications for the study of educational phenomena, this could mean that various modes of explanation may find their place in trying to understand what is involved in teaching pupils and students, in child-rearing, in continuing education and in educational policy and evaluation and so on. Thus there does not seem to be a need for a single

method[4] nor to prioritize one; much depends on the problem that is studied, but also on the kind of theoretical interest one is pursuing. Since various modes of life are involved (the religious, the social, etc.) and various principles (for example rights and freedoms) must be taken into account, an educational context has to be dealt with from a variety of theoretical stances. This may moreover point to the idea that social research does not give us fixed and universal knowledge of the social world as such, but rather that it contributes to the task of improving upon our practical knowledge of ongoing social life and that this presupposes dialogue between all those involved. But when we realize that there are many and often highly contested versions of participants' self-interpretation, we will also see that though the latter are the only plausible starting place, more is needed for good dialogical and social scientific practice. Here science is no longer seen as disinterested and value-free: instead there does not seem to be strict boundaries between science and society. In her contribution the researcher, the interpretive pluralist, will among other things explore the operation of many different practical norms, thus through her interpretation making implicit norms explicit. But she will also necessarily invoke a normative stance. Here facts are no longer seen as exclusively made to refer to objective things in the world or things in themselves, neither are values seen as subjective states of the mind. In avoiding these and other conceptual confusions science reveals itself instead as a performative intervention. Though the researcher's work is in this sense not value-free and possibly directed towards a particular change, it does not coincide with that of the practitioner or the politician. The writing of research may be seen as what prevents from being absorbed in the chaos of unmediated complexity. It allows us time to think and is performed at some distance in the interest of perspective and justice.

Clearly, as educational researchers deal with theories and concepts, the nature of these should be addressed. Theories can be tested, but concepts cannot in the same sense be determined, which implies that more is needed than what experiments, observations or interviews may offer. To put this differently, as research always conveys a commitment to philosophical beliefs even if this is unintended and even though it remains implicit and unacknowledged, researchers cannot evade the responsibility for critically examining and justifying the philosophical ideas that their enquiries incorporate. Thus Wilfred Carr argues that philosophical reflection and argumentation are central features of the methods and procedures of educational research[5]. This implies that educational research should again make room for other forms of study than empirical, be it quantitative or qualitative types

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4. As Ludwig Wittgenstein famously writes in his *Philosophical Investigations*: «…we now demonstrate a method, by examples; and the series of examples can be broken off. –Problems are solved (difficulties eliminated), not a *single* problem. There is not *a* philosophical method, though there are indeed methods, like different therapies» (WITTGENSTEIN, 1953, 133).

5. Quoted in BRIDGES and SMITH, 2006, 131.

of research. Not that we could do without empirical studies, but that there is a need for other kinds of scholarly work as well. This is not to say that everyone from now one should only be doing philosophical, epistemological or philosophy of science work, but it is to argue that these areas should not be neglected if we want that educational research takes up all the aspects that are involved in the study of education, and it has consequences for the way in which curricula are conceived and publication output is measured (as well in terms of content as concerning channels of publication).

5.   THE PREOCCUPATION WITH METHOD

Philosophy and philosophy of education, have devoted considerable time, energy and argument in dealing with the stance educational researchers and scholars of the educational field should embrace in order to study education and all that goes with it. There is critical theory, phenomenology, conceptual analysis, existentialism, Marxism, rationalism, and so on and so forth, to choose from, or so it seems; as there is discourse analysis, ethno-methodology, action research, participatory observation, in-depth interviews, again, just to name a few in the area of so-called qualitative empirical research. There is even a whole strand of literature that deals explicitly with the issue whether 'science' should mean more than 'systematic knowledge' embracing the modern connotation of empiricism and experimentalism or aspire to be something along the lines indicated by the German *Geisteswissenschaften*, sometimes translated as the 'humanities' or the 'humanistic study of culture'. Philosophy seems to supply the central arguments thus exposing the embeddedness of any one point of view in more in more far-reaching sets of assumptions. Thus it can enable us better to understand what might be at stake in any particular view-point and to come to a view for which there is a discernible, appropriate warrant, albeit one which is always exposed to critique. Yet as David Bridges and Richard Smith argue: «The nature and force of such arguments are themselves, of course, philosophical questions, just as the nature and force of evidence in science or history, of reasoning in mathematics or of commentary in literary criticism raise philosophical questions» (Bridges and Smith, 2006, 134). Moreover, some authors may thus offer different accounts of how philosophy itself counts as research; in other words, philosophy does not have to be thought of as a preliminary, perhaps ground-clearing, exercise that comes before 'real' or proper research.

During the grand days of the philosophy of science debate, there was a lot of discussion about paradigms. Hempel, Popper, Kuhn, Lakatos, Feyerabend, but also Gadamer, Ricoeur, Taylor and Habermas, were all, in one way or another, engrossed in questions pertaining to the nature of science or social science. They were also interested in the nature of scientific explanation concerning the social sciences and the way in which explanation related to understanding. They argued for different positions, but were united in the belief that there is no logic of

discovery and no unity in science. Concerning the method to be followed (or the kind of explanation to be sought) there was less unanimity. Things have moved on in various directions. Some authors argue that the work that has been done since then belongs to an 'historical turn', a 'social turn', a 'pragmatic turn', a 'political turn', an 'ethical turn' and even an 'aesthetic turn'. A closer look at the philosophy of the natural sciences nowadays indicates that there are lots of examples of studies where the particular concepts used to explain certain phenomena are placed *within* the discussion of a particular science and practice. The latter is an important lesson that should be learned from philosophy of science: to concern oneself with specific problems in particular areas seems extremely fruitful. As important is it to consider what can be done in a particular social or scientific practice –clearly, science too is a cultural practice. But there is more, as describing what others do in a particular area or considering how they conceptualise the reality as they find it, is probably not enough, as such a critical stance may not be enough to convince others of what needs to be done.

Jean-François Lyotard and others have argued that because of our historical 'thrownness' in the world, we are only capable of producing 'small' and thus very fragmentary stories. But, with such heterogeneity of genres and plurality of stories we can readily live. Indeed, a supra- or extra-historical Archimedean point from which history –also in the chronological sense– could be grasped is not available, and whoever thinks he has found it, opens the door for a revival of ideological fundamentalism and fanaticism. So again, we arrive at the conclusion that only by taking the particular into account, may we possibly arrive at interesting insights. At the same time, the historical discipline warns us that the concepts and frameworks we use, mark and limit our interpretations. Despite the fact that we are necessarily aware of the fragmentary nature of our work, there is nothing else we can do. What follows from this?

That neither insights from philosophy of education nor, more generally, from educational theory can simply be applied in educational contexts is recognised by practitioners and theoreticians. Such recognition can be attributed to epistemological and ethical forces. As regards the kind of theory one needs, however, opinions differ. According to some scholars, the insights we need are beyond what empirical research can deliver. Yet philosophy, or more generally, theory may also be limited. Philosophical argument may show that some questions do not make sense. The philosopher can defy and provoke by offering another reading, another interpretation. However, she cannot impose a compelling argument for either educational practice or theory. For Socrates, at least in one particular reading, the answer has to be kept open. Others will follow this and stress that every answer is necessarily tentative. Perhaps it might be better therefore to embrace the position that in the end one cannot but offer *a particular stance*, a particular judgement, a commitment to this or that in life. Instead of being neutral, only looking for presuppositions, trying to solve puzzles, one indeed shows how things 'have to be'. Taking this advice right from the very beginning may lead to the conclusion that

what has to be offered in our philosophical reflections is above all else, no more than one 'solution' that we are able to commit ourselves to. This conclusion will surely provoke debate. But we are not there yet, as we still have to see whether anything interesting can be said about how we should proceed when engaging in reflecting on education philosophically.

A recent issue of the *Journal of Philosophy of Education* (2009, 3) addresses the question 'What do philosophers of education do? (And how do they do it?)'. In the introduction, Claudia Ruitenberg draws attention to the present academic climate, where the discourse of 'research' is so pervasive that philosophers of education who may be more comfortable thinking of their work as 'scholarship' or 'inquiry' rather than as 'research', yet may feel a need to label their work as 'research', as it may otherwise not counted. Moreover, speaking about research in philosophical research focuses the attention on ways of thinking and writing which thus become available for explicit consideration. Reiterating Rorty's warning not to fall victim to 'methodolatry' (i. e., the uncritical worship of method) the challenge she says is for «philosophers of education to talk about their research methods without submitting to the paradigms and expectations of the social sciences» (Ruitenberg, 2009, 316). If such a focus is open to the displacements the text incurs, if it takes into account that research methods in philosophy of education cannot be divorced from content, and that methodological statements about philosophy of education can perhaps be understood by analogy to artists' statements about their work, there may be some gain. Here 'methods' refers to the «various ways and modes in which philosophers of education think, read, write, speak and listen, that make their work systematic, purposeful and responsive to past and present philosophical and education concerns and conversations» (*ibid.*, 316). And thus an answer is sought to how we might describe with precision and specificity the types of thinking and writing, of analysis, questioning critique, interpretation and so on that philosophers of education engage in, or to what our modes of thought and discursive operations are. Presented with due hesitation, this move is understandable. There is not only the present climate in which we are asked when responding to the call for papers for various conferences to indicate the method we used (not filling in this field resulting in not being able to submit the paper –although experience teaches us that one may pervert the system by putting «I read»), there is also what Ruitenberg calls 'status anxiety', i. e., the desire to have one's work to be regarded in the academy as sufficiently scientific. Indeed, some of our colleagues are sad to observe our standing in 'pure philosophy'– as almost none of these academics ever refer to our work[6]. Why that is the case is not a simple matter to answer. For many of

6. Incidentally, some are clearly worried. At the meeting of the Philosophy of Education Society of the USA in 2008 (Cambridge, MA) a session was scheduled to discuss 'Philosophy of Education and Mainstream Philosophy'. Panellists were Eamonn Callon, Randall Curren, Meira Levinson and Harvey Siegel (Chair: Michael Hand).

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them –though certainly not for all– it seems to me that the study of education (and issues of child rearing) comes not first to their minds as of central importance for their philosophical work (neither as issues to deal with, to take a position on nor to focus on as a context that presents one with genuine problems). It is therefore no surprise at all that many of them are ignorant of our work. Whether we should be worried either about our standing among colleagues in philosophy or educational sciences, or more generally in society, and for what reasons, is a further interesting question. I will return to some of the issues that are involved here later in the paper. For now I will continue with the recourse to method, as not only empirical researchers but philosophers as well have preoccupied themselves with this issue in the past, with no great success I dare to say. But let us first look a bit more closer at what is offered.

The mentioned special issue allows space for 9 authors to write about what they as philosophers of education do and how they do it. This is interesting as far as it goes. Though they are all hesitant to proclaim they have found *the* method (or answer), and contrarily stress the various aspects that have to be taken into account, one may wonder however how helpful what is offered really is. I am aware of the danger that looms behind the corner to make a caricature by referring to only some of the ideas that are argued for, but I will nevertheless give a few examples. Katarina Holma identifies the crucial feature of her approach as «an emphasis on the role of a thoroughgoing process of analysis and synthesis» (Holma, 2009, 326) and stresses the significance of a deep understanding of the concepts. Daniel Vokey draws attention to 'dialectical argument' and holds the belief that «competing conceptual schemes can be assessed according to different kinds of expectations» (Vokey, 2009, 342). Gert Biesta suggests to «witness the occurrence of deconstruction or, to be more precise, to witness *metaphysics-in*-deconstruction» (Biesta, 2009, 394), thus foregrounding «an affirmation of what is wholly other, of what is unforeseeable from the present» (p. 395). Charles Bingham addresses the «method of method» and argues that the name of method can be taken literally or metaphorically: it is «a relation between method itself, the name of the person who has come up with method, and then the name of the person who uses method» (Bingham, 2009, 417). Claudia Ruitenberg deals with the use of translation as a method in philosophical thinking and writing, and argues that translation from theory to practice and different from application, «confronts theory with points of untranslatability that will challenge it» (Ruitenberg, 2009, 431). Andrew Davis focuses in a Wittgensteinian spirit on the detail of specific contexts thus examining in depth the fine-grained complexities of social phenomena and refraining from imposing abstract theory on a recalcitrant reality (Davis, 2009). Marianna Papastephanou is interested in the way in which the connection of philosophy and education can be seen and suggests to attribute to education a more active, politically operative and central role in philosophy. Though she talks about method, much of what she points out seems to be really about content, for instance the steps she distinguishes (cf. Papasthephanou, 2009, 453). Towards the end of her paper she writes: «Instead

of setting "epistemic" notions as primary aims or ideals of philosophy, thus reducing education to the practico-inert, we must acknowledge instances where learning should be an end-in-itself and can effect the disruption of inert realities, philosophies and sciences» (*ibid.*, 467). Finally, some of the authors, i. e., Michael Bonnett (2009) and Richard Smith (2009), do not explicitly write about their method; instead, more than others they offer an example of a particular analysis (of selfhood) respectively of a philosophy seminar. I am sympathetic to 'sell' these contributions as work on method –and thus attracting the attention of those who would normally not be inclined to think about the philosophical points that are addressed in these papers. But really, can one honestly say that this is about method? Is it not *just* about content? So perhaps, our efforts should take a different lead, that is if we honestly think we have something to say not to be ignored by others such as the self-proclaimed *stakeholders* of academia and education. But before going into that, let me say something more on method –I mean content, of course.

6.   SEEING THE POINT OF WHAT I AM INTERESTED IN

The preoccupation with method comes as no surprise. It parallels the debate in the area of empirical educational research. There one finds still the general suspicion that in one way or another, what is offered by social science research including qualitative research, cannot adequately satisfy the need for proper knowledge. What looms behind this concern may be captured by the following false assumption: not understanding everything is equated with not understanding anything. What some writers long for is something similar to the law-like explanation and 'prediction' of the natural sciences. This desire is similar to that of philosophers for whom philosophy has to amount to valid reasoning warranted by methods of conceptual analysis (necessary and sufficient conditions) and logical rules of induction and deduction. Let me point out again that it is however remarkable that though for instance the naive means-end schema that is implicit to these kinds of research has been criticized thoroughly by philosophers (of education), for many researchers it is 'business as usual'. So why is it then that the arguments developed by philosophers of education remain to a large extent sterile *vis-à-vis* the educational realm? Or, to put this differently, how are the arguments themselves to be received (what is their nature), and let us not forget that they too must necessarily be seen as historically embedded in both a particular academic tradition and a more general cultural climate, a *spirit of the times*. The proofs and arguments that feature in the mentioned critiques of educational research often focus on what particular writers seem to be unaware of, namely issues/areas that they have forgotten to address that still need accounting for. The critic will therefore draw attention to a particular point that a researcher overlooked, or did not want to deal with. Consequently, the critic will introduce this point and thereby add another dimension to the discussion. This involves an attempt to illustrate how one's own position is *more true to the nature* of what one is dealing with in accordance with the way

in which one conceptualises what is at stake. The differentiations one makes or the stance one foregrounds may be thought of in terms of a kind of wisdom that has been forgotten or ignored. Moreover, often one *imposes a particular logic* or set of rules that frame the debate. By implication this will exclude some colleagues or other educational researchers (including the empirical researchers one is criticizing) from the discussion[7]. Seeing the point of what is argued for may further be specified for instance as offering differentiations and indicating 'What has been forgotten', drawing further implications of what is at stake, or offering additions to the research agenda. Arguments which specify what should be taken into account do this for instance by prioritising something (else) on the agenda, by asking attention for seeing the point of what appeals (or has lost its appeal, and, it must be said, in some cases also by stressing that one belongs to a community of researchers or *even* to the community of all those involved in the educational debate).

This should not surprise the reader: on the one hand it is an observation based on a meta-analysis of what philosophers argue for; on the other hand it may be asked 'What else can or should they do –then make more sophisticated distinctions, look into the presuppositions of particular agendas or try to see the implications of these?' Yet it may be interesting to note that, more often then not, they (try to) change the agenda, sometimes using the expression '*I* am interested in…', implying that 'you should too'. For this approach to gain any purchase then a perceptive community of scholars and practitioners must be in place that is willing to take what they argue for on board. Such a community must be able to take on board that which is not *simply* logically entailed.

Many philosophers of education have criticized the language of instrumentalism central to both quantitative and qualitative educational research. Often this critique articulates the argument that insufficient attention is given to 'ends' themselves. The discussion of 'ends' is therefore divorced from scientific and/or rational debate. Some philosophers argue that this language seems to leave out the ethical dimension altogether. In many cases Aristotle's concept of a practice (and its recent reformulations by MacIntyre, Taylor and others) is invoked to argue for a different stance. By drawing attention to the regress Lewis Carroll focuses on[8], we may take

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7. For an example of an analysis along this lines in the area of philosophy of educational research see SMEYERS (2009). To substantiate these claims use is made of some of the results and ideas drawn from published collections by the Research Community (cf. SMEYERS and DEPAEPE, 2003, 2006, 2007, 2008).

8. Peter Winch's discusses Lewis Carroll's *What the Tortoise Said to Achilles*. This discussion occupies a central place in *The Idea of a Social Science*. Winch introduces the problem (which I quote here at length) as follows:

"This leads Oakeshott to say, again quite correctly, that a form of human activity can never be summed up in a set of explicit precepts. The activity 'goes beyond' the precepts. For instance, the precepts have to be applied in practice and, although we may formulate another, higher-order, set of

the critique in a different direction. The position 'That all there is to practical rationality is instrumental rationality' can be criticized in a more technical sense. Since instrumental rationality involves a higher-order commitment to combine willing an end with taking the necessary means, it therefore cannot, on pain of regress, be added to (or included in) one of the elements to be combined. Therefore instrumentalism cannot be supported. This entails a criticism of the traditional views of science as elaborated by Hempel and Popper, views that feed into the work of many educational researchers. From this, it does not follow that we must renounce (altogether) the normative force of principles of reasoning such as modus ponens or that there is something wrong with the idea that we learn to do science.

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precepts prescribing how the first set is to be applied, we cannot go further along this road without finding ourselves on the slippery slope pointed out by Lewis Carroll in his paper, justly celebrated amongst logicians, *What the Tortoise Said to Achilles*.

Achilles and the Tortoise are discussing three propositions, A, B, and Z, which are so related that Z follows logically from A and B. The Tortoise asks Achilles to treat him as if he accepted A and B as true but did not yet accept the truth of the hypothetical proposition (C) 'If A and B be true, Z must be true', and to force him, logically, to accept Z as true. Achilles begins by asking the Tortoise to accept C, which the Tortoise does; Achilles then writes in his notebook:

"A

B

C (If A and B are true, Z must be true)

Z".

He now says to the Tortoise: "If you accept A and B and C, you must accept Z", when the Tortoise asks why he must, Achilles replies: "Because it follows *logically* from them. If A and B and C are true, Z *must* be true (D). You don't dispute *that*, I imagine?". The Tortoise agrees to accept D if Achilles will write it down. The following dialogue then ensues. Achilles says:

"Now that you accept A and B and C and D, *of course* you accept Z".

"Do I?" said the Tortoise innocently. "Let's make that quite clear. I accept A and B and C and D. Suppose I *still* refuse to accept Z?".

"Then Logic would take you by the throat, and *force* you to do it!". Achilles triumphantly replied. 'Logic would tell you 'You can't help yourself. Now that you've accepted A and B and C and D, you *must accept* Z'. So you've no choice, you see".

"Whatever *Logic* is good enough to tell me is worth *writing down*", said the Tortoise. "So enter it in your book, please. We will call it

(E) If A and B and C and D are true, Z must be true.

Until I've granted *that*, of course, I needn't grant Z. So it's quite a *necessary* step you see?".

"I see", said Achilles; and there was a touch of sadness in his tone.

The story ends some months later with the narrator returning to the spot and finding the pair still sitting there. The notebook is nearly full.

The moral of this, if I may be boring enough to point it, is that the actual process of drawing an inference, which is after all at the heart of logic, is something which cannot be represented as a logical formula; that, moreover, a sufficient justification for inferring a conclusion from a set of premises is to see that the conclusion does in fact follow. To insist on any further justification is not to be extra cautious; it is to display a misunderstanding of what inference is. Learning to infer is not just a matter of being taught about explicit logical relations between propositions; it is learning *to do* something. Now the point, which Oakeshott is making, is really a generalization of this; where Carroll spoke only of logical inference, Oakeshott is making a similar point about human activities generally» (WINCH, 1958, 55-57).

Neither should the 'sadness' in the tone of Achilles be interpreted as a legitimate kind of scepticism or a justification of it. The point is, however, that 'judging' as a necessary characteristic of practice is highlighted by the 'Achilles' example, which implies that one has to have learnt (mastered) to judge in a particular way in order to take part in a practice (in the case of argumentation), to be able 'to go on'. This too invokes a different concept of practice, i. e. an Aristotelian one, but it does this not because technical rationality leaves out the ends, but because even technical rationality would not make sense without a context in which one had learnt how to apply it.

Philosophy, according to Peter Winch, is concerned with the nature of reality as such and in general and thus deals with the question 'What is real?' The philosopher reminds her audience of the way in which particular concepts are used and thus offers an elucidation of a particular concept. Invoking Wittgenstein, Winch draws attention to the fact that one cannot make a sharp distinction between 'the world' and 'the language in which we try to describe the world', and argues that it is therefore wrong to say that the problems of philosophy arise out of language rather than out of the world: «Because in discussing language philosophically we are in fact discussing *what counts as belonging to the world*. Our idea of what belongs to the realm of reality is given for us in the language that we use. The concepts we have settle for us the form of the experience we have of the world» (Winch, 1958, 15). Not withstanding this, there should be a minimal sense in which what philosophers argue for is given recognition by those who are addressed, i. e., researchers and practitioners in the educational field.

The point made comes down to the rationale that in order for an argument to work, the participants have to see the point. In many cases the arguments of philosophers of education may not be effective simply because educational researchers and practitioners do not appreciate what is going on in that area. They are so preoccupied with other issues that they cannot see how such contributions, which are highly critical of means-end reasoning, are relevant at all. There is further also another dimension to this issue: the willingness to interact, i. e., discuss and engage seems to be largely lacking on the part of quite a few philosophers of education. Might we say that such figures withdraw from the general debate, relying on insights that only they are privy to, insights that are often backed up by 'method' and content, used to arrive at the truth of what they profess?

In philosophy of education (as in educational research in general) it is easier to attack method, the way the discussion is driven provides an alibi for not putting one's cards on the table. The discourse is basically no different from the language of education in that it tries to convince the opponent –an issue which is to some extent a circular process. What philosophers of education argue for often uses a concept of practice that has become silenced by the climate of performativity, and has therefore lost is appeal. This is moreover complicated by that fact that in as far as philosophers can be aware of the presuppositions behind their own work, they must either follow a route they do not want to take (a view from nowhere), or

renounce full acceptance of the consequences following on from the fact that their interpretation is of an evocative nature, which according to many weakens their position. This is a route that many writers are reluctant to take.

The overall consequence of this seems to be that the reconstruction of the discipline offered by philosophers of education will have to be seen in the same sense as any other contribution to an inquiry aimed at the formation of practical insights and judgments[9]. Such offerings will thus have to be evaluated on their own merits[10]. Because of this, the whole notion of 'method'[11] (in educational research including in philosophy of education) must be dispensed with. Moreover the sadness that may accompany this loss should be welcomed. We might also note that this reconstruction cannot come about unless there is some engagement with practical educational issues. Philosophers would have to take part in the discourse of parents, teachers and other researchers. This form of engagement would include looking for alternatives to the problems that make sense to everyone participating in such an inclusive discourse[12].

7.   WELCOMING A CERTAIN KIND OF CIRCULARITY: A BREEDING PROGRAMME FOR AN ENDANGERED
      SPECIES

To some extent what researchers and those who reflect upon research are doing is circular. But this kind of circularity is not to be dismissed for it is characteristic of all explanation. Science, as for that matter any kind of explanation, will always take the data which is to be interpreted to a higher stage of abstraction, thus invoking a particular theoretical construction which makes sense. This is a circular process in which each level is taken to account for, to derive from, or to elaborate on the other. Thus instances are explained by patterns and patterns by instances. Dick Dick Pels makes a similar point:

9.   This brings forward the problem of underdetermination. What is taken up here embraces a contextualist view about knowledge (as developed for instance by Michael WILLIAMS, 2001) and is consistent with the 'Situated Philosophy of Education' stance (as developed by Nick BURBULES and Kathleen Knight ABOWITZ, 2009).

10.   Evidently, it is possible to continue to practice philosophy of education in the way most academics are used to. However, if one accepts that philosophy of education should speak to all those involved in educational contexts, the overall consequence that is spelled out should be accepted. This is equally true of this paper, which professes to make explicit a direction in which the debate should be going. Evidently, the described characteristics apply to it. (It is evocative and rather than expressing a logical set of consequences which have to be accepted, it takes the form of an appeal).

11.   In the sense that a particular method is prioritized over others.

12.   That this transgresses the classical debates between the *a* priori and the *a* posteriori, between facts and values, between epistemology, ethics, and anthropology, as well as between theory and practice, goes without saying. Moreover, this position also departs from the debate concerning the priority of the epistemological compared to the ethical order (or vice versa).

> …the epistemological break between science and (scientific) common sense, or between observer and observed, does not turn upon the conventional distinction between 'merely partial' views and views that claim the ability to totalise, but upon the somewhat unconventional distinction between views that are self-consciously circular and views (both everyday and sociological-scientific) that deny this circularity in order to claim a 'straight' transcendent foundation (Pels, 2003, 176).

What can we affirm? That the dominant mode of doing research (and how this is taught and learnt) should be a never ending quest involving reflection on 'method' (which is another way of saying that there is not *a* method but only methods conceived as sound arguments, but also that we should not have an altogether dismissive attitude towards method, i. e. the way to proceed). Also, what is at stake here is the danger of becoming unintelligible that may result from giving up on science and its form of 'rationality' for that which resembles fiction, or comes down to delusion or fortune-telling). Further, that the logic of educational research is *of the world* and should not aspire to be *off the world* (characterized by 'crystalline purity') which would result in neglecting the force of context and that research should always be seen as a performative intervention. Finally, that educational research only adds one voice to the on-going dialogue of all those involved. And to this one should add that the mentioned characteristics apply as well to philosophical research.

This does not imply that values should be placed high on the agenda of education 'again' (if that were possible at all), but that a particular way of dealing with reality that obfuscates (or even silences) this dimension should be resisted. The real danger is not so much that values play a less important role, but that we get used to or convinced of the fact that we could speak of reality via an apparatus that does not take them into account. Otherwise, what is meaningful and significant, what makes sense for us, is excluded and so-called neutral concepts that identify what is effective and efficient set the stage and become the only reality we can conceive of.

What we need is a detailed analysis of educational policy and practice combined with suggestions about how things could be done otherwise[13]. Granted, 'theory' is always there if one conceptualizes the reality one lives in. But this kind of theory takes the deeper Socratic irony a step further. It seeks to change the reality beyond the traditional dichotomy of practice and theory and it fully accepts that it is beyond 'good' and 'evil'. In a recent paper Richard Smith (2008) wonders how far notions of philosophy as austere and analytic are responsible for ideals

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13. There is evidently no shortage of cases one may want to deal with. At the time of writing this paper (August/September 2009) there is again in Belgium a vigorous debate about the headscarf (in schools) and a Dutch court has put a 13-year old under care, stalling her bid to become the youngest person to sail solo for two years around the world in a 26 feet boat.

of educational research as unnaturally tidy and formal, and even for conceptions of the practice of education in schools and universities as focused on targets, performance-indicators and statistics. I would like to add that we are also responsible for the appreciation we enjoy from colleagues and practitioners in the field of education. Far too many papers by philosophers of education as well at general education conferences as at specific philosophy of education meetings are too (or sometimes even only) expository of the thoughts of the author one reveres and do not engage with education (in some cases not even with the insights of fellow academics). Often also one point is taken up which is then enlarged and the relevance of it blown out of proportion. One seems to forget that one is dealing with a highly complex matter that does not allow to be oblivious to the many aspects that are involved.

8.   CONCLUSION

A general summation of the position I have been arguing for could be, that we have to continue to criticise particular explanatory models and particular developments in educational practices. Indeed, we have to be attentive to developments that might be harmful and take internal or external power relationships into account. But there is more. The debate about 'method' as such is no longer fertile (if it ever was). The position of the philosopher of education may be somewhat similar to the mathematician's who replaces one formal system with another, and though this remains of a tautological nature, it may help to 'solve' a particular problem. In some cases this may mean that, to use a Wittgensteinian expression, the problem 'disappears' (cf. Wittgenstein, 1953, I, 133); in others that a 'new way of looking at things' is offered (cf. Wittgenstein, 1953, I, 144). The expertise of the philosopher lies not so much in method –perhaps it is worthwhile to recall Paul Feyerabend's battle against method– as in being knowledgeable of the discussions of the past, of the issues that were at stake and the way these were dealt with. I thus have come to hold the belief that, in our work as philosophers of education, relevance and progress can only come about if we unravel what is involved in particular cases of educational practice. This would involve refraining from being habitually critical and consequently coming up with suggestions. In this way, we would present ourselves as true participants in the debate. Incidentally, as more and more conflicts are dealt with in courts of law –in general, but educational matters are no exception to this– it is not unthinkable that philosophers of education could make an important contribution in this context but also more generally to societal debates. This would surely generate 'political' research (commitment or being engaged express this possibly better), but it may be beyond positivism and nihilism, the kind that does more than just a *Spielerei* of ever more and more futile research, and that is as receptive to what was valuable in the past, as to what is worthwhile in the present.

This presupposes that the «tortoise» will open up and allow herself to be convinced. It is questionable whether Humpty Dumpty[14] would welcome it. Thus a new kind of sadness overwhelms 'Achilles'. It is similar to but more profound than the sadness pertaining to logic, which could be surpassed or transgressed. The conditions we find ourselves in today, such as the demand for performativity in educational contexts, should not be lamented but taken seriously. This may not necessarily mean that we have to give up technical language altogether, but it has consequences for what and who we address. What remains for us to do is perhaps nothing more than redefining the field along the lines of what John Elliott argued for, which not only comes down to giving up methodology and «method», but giving up research into education in favour of educational research. For Elliott, educational research is «…a form of inquiry aimed at the formation of practical insights and judgments» (2006, 169). The knockdown argument we are left with is thus of a rhetorical or evocative kind. It finds a foothold in seduction and attraction in order to instil a new way in which something may make sense to us. It is thus about content instead of method. In the most general terms it is quite simple: Do something that is interesting! The crucial question is: Interesting for who? Indeed, interesting, isn't it –a concept pregnant of a plethora of meanings in English.

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14. "I don't know what you mean by 'glory'" Alice said.
Humpty Dumpty smiles contemptuously. "Of course you don't - till I tell you. I meant 'there's a nice know-down argument' for you!".
"But "glory" doesn't mean ""a nice know-down argument"", Alice objected.
"When I use a word", Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less!.
"'The question is'", said Alice, "'whether you *can* make words mean so many different things'".
"'The question is!'", said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be the master - that's all"». (CARROLL, 1977, 196).

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